

REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE

Form Approved
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|--|---|--|---------------------------------------|---|--|
| 1. AGENCY USE ONLY (Leave Blank) | | 2. REPORT DATE February 1, 1987 | | 3. REPORT TYPE AND DATES COVERED Final | |
| 4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE Democracy in the Republic of Korea: Real or Imaginary? Factionalism in the New Korea Democratic Party | | | | 5. FUNDING NUMBERS | |
| 6. AUTHOR(S) Rodney Katz | | | | | |
| 7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) Federal Research Division Library of Congress Washington, DC 20540-4840 | | | | 8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER | |
| 9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) N/A | | | | 10. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY REPORT NUMBER | |
| 11. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES Prepared under an Interagency Agreement | | | | | |
| 12a. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for public release; distribution unlimited. | | | | 12b. DISTRIBUTION CODE | |
| 13. ABSTRACT (Maximum 200 words) This study discusses the political strategy of the New Korea Democratic Party (NKDP) and examines alternatives to that strategy. It concludes that the party's efforts to stifle dissent in the NKDP could have deleterious effects on democracy in the Republic of Korea. | | | | | |
| 14. SUBJECT TERMS North Korea Government Politics | | | | 15. NUMBER OF PAGES 5 | |
| | | | | 16. PRICE CODE | |
| 17. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF REPORT UNCLASSIFIED | 18. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF THIS PAGE UNCLASSIFIED | 19. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF ABSTRACT UNCLASSIFIED | 20. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT SAR | | |
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**DEMOCRACY IN THE REPUBLIC OF KOREA:
REAL OR IMAGINARY?
FACTIONALISM IN THE NEW KOREA
DEMOCRATIC PARTY**

*A report prepared under an Interagency Agreement
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February 1987

Author: Rodney P. Katz

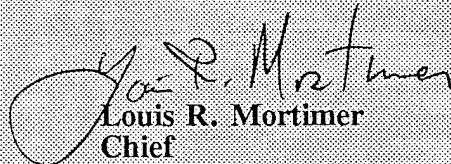
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PREFACE

This study discusses the political strategy of the New Korea Democratic Party (NKDP) and suggests alternatives to that strategy. It notes that the two major NKDP factions favor a hard-line strategy which precludes political compromises on the issue of the direct election of the president, while the minor factions want to reopen a dialogue with the ruling Democratic Justice Party (DJP) on a wide range of issues related to democratization. The recent dispute between party president Lee Min-Woo and the NKDP's defacto leaders, Kim Dae Jung and Kim Yong Sam, over party strategy is also discussed. It concludes that efforts by the two Kims to stifle dissent in the NKDP could have deleterious effects on democracy in the Republic of Korea.

This study is the first in a series on issues related to the development of democracy in the Republic of Korea. The information is current as of 1 February 1987.

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DEMOCRACY IN THE REPUBLIC OF KOREA: REAL OR IMAGINARY?
FACTIONALISM IN THE NEW KOREA DEMOCRATIC PARTY

INTRODUCTION

In January 1985, in an effort to promote a united political front against President Chun Doo Hwan's Democratic Justice Party (DJP), Kim Dae Jung and Kim Yong Sam, South Korea's two most prominent opposing politicians, joined forces to establish the New Korea Democratic Party (NKDP). At the time the two Kims were among several hundred politicians who were legally prohibited from participating in political activities. However, President Chun, as part of a carefully orchestrated plan intended to convince his critics at home and abroad that he was prepared to allow legitimate political opposition to his regime, banned the two Kims from running for public office, but allowed them to control NKDP activities through an organization known as the Council for the Promotion of Democracy (CPD). Thus, Kim Dae Jung and Kim Yong Sam handpicked the NKDP leadership and have remained in control of party affairs since 1985.¹

In the 12th National Assembly election held on 12 February 1985, the NKDP was able to win 50 district and 17 at-large seats. Largely because of their affiliation with the two Kims, NKDP candidates for the Assembly running on a platform calling for the democratization of the country's political system, did well in metropolitan areas such as Seoul, Pusan, and Kwangju. Although the DJP won undisputed control of the unicameral legislature, it did so only because of provisions in the election law that awarded two-thirds of the at-large seats to the political party which had the largest number of candidates elected. Chun's party won 87 district seats and, therefore, was awarded 61 of 92 at-large seats, giving it a majority of 10 in the 276-seat National Assembly.²

Within the NKDP there are a number of factions. Kim Yong Sam and Kim Dae Jung lead the largest and second largest factions, respectively, and together they control the majority of NKDP lawmakers. The absence of major public differences between the two Kims has resulted in an effective coalition between the so-called mainstream factions. Kim Dae Jung and Kim Yong Sam meet frequently and coordinate party strategy. Their joint directives are then communicated to the NKDP Executive Council which usually accepts them and promulgates the party line. However, a few NKDP assemblymen have formed their own splinter groups which occasionally oppose party policies. Frequently

referred to as nonmainstream factions, each of these groups has fewer than 10 members. The biggest, with nine members, is led by Lee Chul Seung and includes NKDP Vice President Kim Soon Han. Other splinter groups led by Lee Ki Taek and Kim Jae Kwang have 8 and 5 members, respectively. Although President Lee Min-Woo is usually considered to be a member of Kim Yong Sam's faction, he has in recent months attempted to stress views on democratization that are not shared by the two Kims.³

For most of the last 2 years factionalism has not been a serious problem in the NKDP. Kim Dae Jung and Kim Yong Sam continue to meet frequently and cooperate well with one another. In November 1986, Kim Dae Jung declared that he would not be a candidate for president in 1987. His decision was motivated in part by the government's prohibiting him from running for public office or even officially joining the NKDP, and in part by his interest in promoting Kim Yong Sam's chances of defeating the DJP candidate.⁴

However, in late 1986 it became apparent that there was growing dissatisfaction among nonmainstreamers in the NKDP concerning party policies and organization. Some complained that the two Kims were not allowing the Executive Council to play a significant role in determining party policies.⁵ Others felt that the boycott of the National Assembly in the latter part of 1986 hurt the party's image and may have reduced public support for the methods being used to push for democratization.⁶ With the government in a position to call elections at any time, many of the nonmainstreamers have argued that the NKDP must participate in the proceedings of the National Assembly to demonstrate to voters that the party will promote democratization within the existing political system as well as in the streets.

LEE MIN-WOO CHALLENGES THE TWO KIMS

In late December 1986 and early January 1987, what appeared to be a NKDP move to end the stalemate on constitutional reform turned out to be the public airing of an intraparty debate on negotiating strategy. On 24 December NKDP President Lee Min-Woo suggested inter-party negotiations on the DJP's parliamentary system proposal should the government take action on a number of democratic reforms including guaranteeing freedom of the press, releasing political prisoners, instituting local autonomy measures in selected cities, and prosecuting public officials for interfering with the legal operations of religious, civil liberty, and

political groups.⁷ On 26 December the NKDP Executive Council appeared to support the portion of Lee's proposal that dealt with democratic reforms. Party spokesman Hong Sa-tok announced on that date that the party would strive to achieve both democratic reforms and the direct election of the president. There was no mention in Hong's announcement of the NKDP's willingness under any circumstances to negotiate with the DJP on the latter's parliamentary system proposal.⁸

Over the next 2 weeks it became evident that Lee had not conferred with Kim Yong Sam and Kim Dae Jung before publicizing his attempt at interparty fence-mending. On 7 January Lee implied that he would resign his position unless the two Kims accepted the Executive Council's decision to place equal emphasis on democratic reforms and the issue of the direct election of the president.⁹ At a 15 January meeting Lee and Kim Yong Sam agreed that the NKDP under no circumstances would participate in inter-party negotiations on the DJP's parliamentary system proposal. Press reports on the meeting suggested that Lee also agreed to stop calling for interparty negotiations on democratic reforms this was not the case. On 27 January, for example, Lee urged the government to release political prisoners, end the involvement of public officials in political activities, and guarantee civil liberties in exchange for interparty negotiations on the electoral law and the local autonomy system.¹⁰

Lee opposes the hard-line strategy of the two Kims for three reasons. First, he believes that Kim Dae Jung and Kim Yong Sam are placing too much emphasis on confrontational politics. Although Lee is not against the NKDP's involvement in public demonstrations promoting democracy--he was an active support of the February 1987 demonstration at the Myongdong Cathedral against a student tortured to death by police--he believes it is unrealistic to expect change unless the party is willing to negotiate with the DJP on democratic reforms and other important issues. He argues that NKDP assemblymen should strive to accomplish democratization with "a sense of reconciliation."¹¹ Second, he fears that President Chun will impose martial law and dissolve the National Assembly unless the NKDP comes to the bargaining table. Finally, as the party's president and elder statesman, he expects his political opinions to be respected. Lee probably has been trying for months to influence Kim Yong Sam and Kim Dae Jung to allow party assemblymen to return to the business of legislating and to work within the system for change. Although Lee does not consider himself to be a nonmainstreamer, he clearly identifies with many of their concerns about the party's future.

THE TWO KIMS TIGHTEN THEIR CONTROL OVER THE NKDP

It appears now that Lee is merely being tolerated by the two Kims. Several press reports have stated that Kim Yong Sam plans to seek election as the party president at the NKDP national convention currently scheduled for May 1987.¹² This move would increase his control over the party organization and could enhance his credibility with voters when and if there is a presidential election in late 1987 or early 1988 to determine who will succeed Chun Doo Hwan. Additionally, the two Kims have removed Hong Sa-tok from his position as party spokesman and changed voting procedures in the Executive Council to tighten their control over public announcements and policy-making. Although Hong belongs to Kim Yong Sam's faction, he was probably the scapegoat for that group's dissatisfaction with Lee Min-Woo's opposition to the hard-line strategy. Hong's mistake was reporting what the Executive Council decided on 26 December.¹³ Within the Executive Council, policy recommendations, which in the past were approved by majority rule, must now receive unanimous consent.¹⁴

CONCLUSION

The arguments presented by Lee Min-Woo and the nonmainstreamers of the NKDP seem to make good political sense. Actions such as boycotts of the National Assembly are counterproductive unless they promote some political change. So far there have been no indications that President Chun is willing to compromise with the opposition on the issue of the direct election of the president. If Kim Dae Jung and Kim Yong Sam are committed to creating a viable two-party system, it is hard to understand why they are coming down so hard on those within the NKDP who are appealing for dialogue and compromise, two basic elements of the democratic political process. Although the 1980 constitution, election laws, and government abuses of power may prevent the NKDP from winning the presidency or control of the National Assembly in 1987, the party is in a position to improve on its impressive showing in the 1985 election. A fair election that results in a more equitable distribution of political power would be a positive step toward the establishment of democracy in the Republic of Korea.

NOTES

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